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AUTHOR Cornelius, Sandra: Baker, Timothy
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ABSTRACT

Based on the assumption that a relationship exists between public county-based child welfare agencies in Pennsylvania and their environments, this study draws clues as to the nature of this relationship from (1) a review of the literature, and (2) a multivariate analysis of agency service delivery measures and social and demographic variables. Standard measures as well as variables drawn from the literature review were studied. These measures and variables included the following: density of population and population size: number of teenage pregnancies and out of wedlock births: child death rates: marriage, divorce, and adoptive home rates: home owner occupancy rate: location of children (with mother versus with relatives): crime rates: presence of racial and minority groups: level of public assistance use and tax level: proportion of white collar jobs in job market: school dropout rate: veterans and child support rate: and health and family status. Among the results of this analysis, it was found (as expected) that the poor generally receive more services, and (unexpectedly) that children proportionately receive fewer services in urban areas. (Author/SS)

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THE RISK CLIMATE AND THE DELIVERY OF CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

by

Sandra Cornelius, Ph.D.
Timothy Baker, Ph.D.

Assuming there to be a relationship between public county-based child welfare agencies in Pennsylvania and their environments, this study draws clues as to the nature of the relationship first from a review of the literature and then from a multi-variate analysis of agency service delivery measures and social and demographic variables. Significant correlations support some expected elements of the relationship (the poor generally receive more services) and a few unexpected elements (children proportionately receive fewer services in urban areas). The strength of the correlations suggest that performance measures may be developed and the complexity of the relationship disparages use of univariate needs assessments.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is about factors in the social and economic environment which relate to greater or lesser numbers of children being served by Child Welfare Agencies in the 67 counties of Pennsylvania. The paper began modestly as an attempt to develop base line measures against which to gauge Child Welfare Agencies' performances in meeting permanency planning goals. Without such measures, agencies that had moved early to remove fewer children from their natural families hence would have fewer children to move to adoptive homes or return to their natural parents might be considered to have performed less well than those agencies with large members of children who could be moved to more permanent settings. Agencies in counties that have more children at risk as it were might need different performance evaluation scales than those counties with fewer children likely to come to the attention of public agencies.

The original focus of the paper was an academic one, the development of theoretical models to explain the behavior of local agencies in response to a felt need and existing realities. The original paper submitted for this conference "Risk Climate and the Delivery of Child Welfare Services" attended to the correlations between certain socio-

economic and demographic variables and types of services delivered by the 67 county Child Welfare Agencies in Pennsylvania.

The press of external events, specifically the fiscal crisis in child welfare in the State caused the authors to shift their emphasis from the development of social theory to the question of whether insights gained from such research could be applied directly to questions of social policy and practice.

While the result of this shift is a recommended formula to accomplish an equitable distribution of legislatively allocated funds, the process used to derive the formula represents a major shift from the exisiting "needs less resources equals what you do" model of planning to one that addresses the distribution of scarce resources.

It is this process, building on methodologies and fundings of the original paper along with a discussion of the potentials and limitations of such procedures that we would like to share with you.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The hypothesis that the environmental context within which Child Welfare Agencies exist constitutes a risk climate rests upon two broad assumptions. The first is that the Child Welfare Agency is a social institution and as such its organizational behavior is related to environmental elements. The second is that parents needs to be able to mobilize certain resources to manage a full range of physical, cultural, social, and educational tasks to successfully raise children. Parents unable to mobilize the minimum resources necessary to effect this child raising are more likely to come to the attention of Child Welfare Agencies.

Taking for granted that there is a relationship between the child welfare organizations and the environment, a host of studies have attempted to describe discreet elements of the relationships.[6,7,8] Proceeding from a conceptual framework that identifies the environment generating the victim and the child welfare agency receiving and changing the victim, these studies fall into two main groups. The first series examines the demographics of epidemiology of abuse and neglect. The second series examines clients of agencies and agency's responses to clients.

Those studies that examine the "climate" or environmental characteristics surrounding the incidences of abuse and neglect are the most numerous and the most methodologically sophisticated. Numerous surveys in the late sixties and early seventies identified links between socio-economic and demographic factors and child maltreatment. People with low socio-economic status, unemployment histories and poor educational achievement were over-represented in abusing populations.[9,10,11,12] Stress related to inadequate income, psychological problems in material functions and difficulties associated with transient living arrangements were identified as correlates of child maltreatment at mid-decade.[13,14,15]

Drawing on the explanatory model of child maltreatment developed by Gil, Gelles and Bronfenbrenner, Garbarino's are the most methodologically sophisticated studies to date.[15-21] In a series of papers dating from 1976, he related national, county and sub-county neighborhood socio-economic and demographic variables to the incidence of child maltreatment. Garbarino[16-20] identified a cluster of variables that can predict 81% of the variance in the incidence of child maltreatment. His work, as well as that of Snapper et. al.[21] and Kogan[22] set the stage for the analysis of the impact of neighborhood characteristics on levels of family functioning. It should be noted, however, that Garbarino's analysis of community factors that correlate with child maltreatment uses reported child abuse as the dependent variable. Analyses of the relationship of community correlates to other child welfare services as well as identification of environmental factors that influence definitions of child abuse, neglect, parental inadequacy could not be found in the literature reviewed.

There are child welfare agency studies that relate service decisions to the demographic socio-economic and psychological characteristics of the maltreating family. In profiling biological parents from data provided by foster care studies in 55 states, Vasaly says "as a group they tend to be maritally unstable. Most report having several children: few of the children live with parents. The parents are generally poorly educated. Many are unemployed and those who are employed are apt to be employed at unskilled or semi-skilled work. Most are below poverty level income and many receive public assistance."[23]

Although such problems (environmental stress, deprivation, inadequate housing, financial need, unemployment problems) are present in most of the biological families in question, they are only cited as reasons for placement in only three to seven percent of the cases according to Kadushin in his

review of the major foster care studies of the first two-thirds of the decade. Parental incapacity as defined by the worker appears to be the primary reason for child placement accounting for 70-80 percent of the reasons used by workers for placement with the child's behavior accounting for an addition 10-15 percent.[24] As Jenkins and Norman state, "Children do not come into care because their parents are poor or black or sick. If that were the case, the number in care would be larger. Poverty is a necessary but not sufficient condition for placement. It is the marginal family whose characteristics and social circumstances are such that it cannot sustain further stress that utilizes placement as a last resort when its own fragile supports break down."[25] As may be expected, in those studies that ask biological parents the reason for their children's placement, their answers differed somewhat from the conclusions of the workers. Parents more frequently saw the child's behavior and situational stress as the reason for child leaving their home. They considered their own problems (mental, physical) as reason for placement much less frequently.[26]

There is another body of literature that seeks to document and codify service worker decision-making. The scope of many of these projects is an analysis of the intra-agency organization, and conclusions reached have been limited to that territory. (See, for example, Pike's monograph[27] on "Permanent Planning for Children in Foster Care."[28] Wald[29] and Claburn.[30]) The analysis and evaluation of changes brought by these inter-agency organization projects have been limited to statements of change relative to the given site's performance in the past. Stephen Magura's[31] thoughtful review of trends in entries to family foster care and length of time in care for children in New Jersey from 1973 to 1978, limits itself to an analysis of trend changes. It also attempts to develop local criteria for evaluating the impact of a new State-wide judicial case review variant on permanency planning. Edward Mech's "Decision Analysis in Foster Care

Practice",[32] however, attempts to look at the internal agency system as well as certain outside environmental factors concluding that 32 percent of worker's decisions to place were based on the natural mother's illness (mental or physical). Forczyner and Pare[33] in "The Influence of Environmental Factors in Foster Care" move in the direction noted in the next section, but use the case rather than the agency as the unit of analysis. Based on a sample of 40, they seek to identify the relative influence of parent behavior, child behavior, personal or chance circumstance and environmental circumstances compared to entry into and exit from foster care. Using the Q-sort techniques they conclude that environmental factors significantly accounted for foster care discharge.

The second assumption, that parents need to mobilize certain resources to successfully manage the physical, cultural, social and educational tasks of raising children, has broad support in the literature that relates to abuse and neglect. Helfer and Kempe,[34] DeFrancis,[35] Criswell,[36] Holter and Friedman[37] and Polansky[38] have presented information to support the notion that abusive and neglecting families are psychologically disturbed. Clinical symptoms that are over-represented in their samples include poor self-concept, unrealistic expectations of children, relationship stress, emotional immaturity, elevated levels of anger and frustration and occasionally more severe psychopathology. Mitchell[39] attributes abuse to particular situational circumstances in which the family exists and on a precipitating crisis. "Abuse or neglect of a child frequently is due, not to malice, but to the fact that parents are overwhelmed by their life circumstances." Rose[40] list 13 critical stresses associated with a breakdown of mothering which may occur singly or in combination. Duncan et. al,[41] Light,[42] and Newberger et. al,[43] have also moved to connect indvidual level data on stress to incidences

of maltreatment. Gil,[44] Gelles,[45] and Light[46] disparage the attribution of casualty to just sociological variables, stating in a variety of ways that such an explanation is sufficient and inadequate, because sociological factors are not exclusive to abusive or neglectful parents. Moving to combine psychological environmental and sociological factors into an explanatory model, Gelles has delineated the following factors as significant in causing abuse and neglect: the social position of the parents, their socialization experience with regard to aggression, the parents psychopathic states and their class and community values and norms of violence. Situational stress is also included in the model in the form of the relationship between the parents, structural stress and child-produced stress. Immediate precipitating situations, such as an argument or a misbehaving child may also play a part in bringing on an incident of abuse, social and economic factors in the community and the amount.[47]

The literature reviewed substantially supports the two broad assumptions upon which is based the hypothesis that the environmental context within which Child Welfare Agencies exist constitute a risk climate: (1) that the agency is a social institution and as such, its organizational behavior is related to environmental elements; and (2) that parents need to be able to mobilize certain resources to manage a full range of physical, cultural, social and educational tasks to successfully raise children; and those who fail to do so are more likely to come to the attention of Child Welfare Agencies. Studies have documented the relationship between socio-economic factors and the incidence of child maltreatment. Others have substantiated the increased incidence of certain of these factors in families whose children are taken into foster care. And still others have documented the effect of natural parents' socio-economic status on service outcome. It is important for the policy formulator and program implementor to take these

conditions (as well as those noted in the section below) into account when developing criteria for the equitable distribution of increasingly scarce resources and when developing techniques for monitoring and evaluating programs. Failure to do so is not only to the disadvantage of those children whom the agency serves or fails to serve, but also to the public whose money is supporting these efforts.

THE CORRELATES OF CHILD WELFARE SERVICE DELIVERY RATES

As noted in the introduction, the original purpose of this study was to look at the relationship between the service delivery rates of the 67 county Child Welfare Agencies in Pennsylvania and the social and economic conditions existing in those localities.

Table A presents the zero order correlations of the proportion of the child population served in the four types of services by the county, Own Homes, Foster Homes, Adoptive Homes and Institutions with several measures of social and economic conditions existing in these counties. As an example of how to interpret these, there is a +.46 correlation between the rate of out of wedlock births and institutionalization. This means that the higher was the out of wedlock birth rate in the county, the higher would be the institutionalization rate generally. This correlation was significant at the .001 level. This means that there was less than one in a thousand chances that this result occured by chance. Conversely, the variables indexing Family Status had a -.39 correlation, significant at the .01 level. This means that there was less than one in a thousand chances that this result occured by chance. Conversely, the variables indexing Family Status had a -.39 correlation, significant at the .01 level. This meant that the lower the family status, the more the institutionalization. There was less than one in a hundred probability that this occured by chance. It should be noted that because of the instability of certain measures in counties with few people, only counties with child population of over 10,000 were included.

Most of the relationships were in the direction expected; some were not. Possibly of greater importance were the relative magnitudes of some of these correlations. Some conditions one would expect to correlate highly with child welfare rates did not. Others which have not been studied as

extensively, seemed to account for a great deal of difference. Below, the findings are briefly reviewed. No attempt will be made in this paper to pull the findings together into an overall theoretical framework; this is the objective to be fulfilled in later works:

Demographics: Density of the population (persons per square mile) rather than population size seemed to be the salient demographic feature as pertains to placement services.

Social Demographics: Teenage pregnancies and out of wedlock births were very high predictors of placement. Also significant were the overall fetal, neo-natal and late teen death rates. The direction of the relationship between these middle two measures is of particular interest. The Marriage and Divorce Rates related significantly only to the Adoptive Home rates.

Living Arrangements: The owner occupancy rate (one of the highest indices of social and economic stability) was the highest correlate with Own Home service delivery. It had a very low correlation with Institutionalization. The relative numbers at one person households was high, not only with Own Home service, but also with placement.

Location of Children: Where children lived in female-headed household, there was generally very high Foster Home and Institutionalization rates and generally higher Own Home and Adoptive Home services. The rate of children living with relatives was highly correlated with placement.

Crime Rates: The crime clearance rate (the percentage of the reported crimes which are "solved") is, like owner occupancy rates, a generally good index of social stability. The direction and magnitude of this measure with placement rates is of interest. It indicates that there might be higher rates of placement in more socially stable areas.

Race and Nationality: There was a high positive correlation with institutionalization and two diverse groups: the Blacks and other minorities in the racial groups as well as two groups usually considered at the opposite end of the racial pole (Swedes and Canadians). This suggests a possibility of an "U" shape curve with this aspect of the social fabric.[51]

Economic: As with the Race and Nationality measures, there would appear to be a similar non-linear relationship. The relative percentage of the population below poverty is high with foster home utilization, but not with the other service types. Public Assistance use is high with Foster Home and Institutional Use, but much lower with Own Home Service delivery. When looking at the correlations of the relative percentage of the tax returns in the various categories, the configuration on Table I appears. Only Own Home Service reaches significance below the $6,000 level. Own Home, Foster Home and Institutionalization Services all have the strongest correlations where the $6,000 to $11,000 returns are highest. They then all drop significantly in the $11,000 to $30,000 category and rise in the over $30,000 groups. Considerable further analysis is necessary in this area.

Employment: There would appear to be somewhat higher Child Welfare service rates where the white collar jobs of Finance, Insurance and Real Estate represent a higher portion of the job market. The unemployment rate was only weakly connected.

School Dropout Rate: These rates were highly significantly correlated as relates to those quitting school, without employment.

Veterans and Child Support Rate: These measures index other social and economic factors in the community, and should be viewed accordingly.

Social and Economic Indicators: The Indicators presented here were developed by Ross, Bluestone and Hines for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.[52] Health and Family Status are particulary important.

As noted above, no complex analysis was done concerning the inter-relationships of these variables. One thing is plain, however, the external forces impacting on the delivery of serivce to children are very strong, and also very complex.

THE USE OF RISK DATA IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ALLOCATION FORMULA:

Up until this year, funding for child welfare services in Pennsylvania was uncapped. County governments could draw down as much money as they felt necessary to meet the needs of dependent, neglected and delinquent children in their jurisdiction by providing the necessary amount of county match money based on a set formula. A growing fiscal crisis in the state changed this, with a decision being made to put a ceiling on these funds. The primary questions which arose from this was around how could this be accomplished in the most equatable fashion? Was an allocation based on past levels of expenditure penalizing those who had previously instituted economics and rewarded those who had not? Was an allocation based on population punishing counties who had more difficult problems to contend with? Was there some way of predicting "need", and making allocation based on this?

Having been studying this question of predicting need for the original paper, the authors shifted their focus to one of seeing whether the available data could be used for the purpose of budgetary allocation. What follows is a discussion of the underlying principles and processes which were developed out of this effort. The first question posed was whether the data could be used to predict service delivery levels (i.e. the normal level of service a county would be expected to provide granting the social

and economic conditions present.) While the zero order correlations presented in Table A suggested that these conditions did impact on service delivery levels, it was obvious that the situation was far too complex to use any single-factor adjustment formula. The techniques of multiple regression analysis were, therefore, applied. By removing variables which were not statistically related or were highly intercorrelated with other measures, the list of 151 variables was reduced to the minimum number of variables which jointly accounted for the greatest amount of variance and which were all significant at the .05 level when the intercorrelated effects of the other variables included were held constant. Using this process, 13 measures accounting for 43% of the variance in Own Home Service delivery, 6 measures accounting for 53% in Foster Homes, 7 measures accounting for 34% in Adoptive Homes, and 6 measures accounting for 53% in Institutionalization were identified. Based on the formulae resulting from this multiple regression process, the predicted rates in the four categories were computed and added together, yielding a total predicted rate of children served for a county granting the social and economic conditions present in that location.

Recognizing that the costs of providing care is not constant in different locations, an effort was made to find some "cost of living" adjustment factor. There being none available which could be used to divide the counties, the data on the costs for the agency in the last year were drawn and divided by the numbers of children served, thus giving a "cost per child" figure. A similar multiple regression analysis was done on these figures, and 8 measures accounting for 63% of the variance were derived.[53] The final step in the process was to multiply the projected numbers of children served by the cost per child for each county, to then derive a constant which would result in the funds allocated being the ceiling

dollar level, and to multiply the total projected cost by this constant.[54] It was proposed, then, that counties be allowed to draw down state child welfare funds up to the resulting dollar amount. If the county wished to spend more money, they could, of course, do so; but would not receive matching state funds. They could also opt to not invest county funds to draw down their allotted amount, and the excess funds would be returned to the Department of Welfare for redistribution. Needless to say, this process would be gone through each successive year based on the latest available data about both the Child Welfare Service delivery rates and the social and economic conditions in the community.

UNASWERED QUESTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

Needless to say, the process proposed above for equitably distributing funds is not "the way" of accomplishing the desired end but rather "a way". It is currently being discussed both by County and State Officials. Several questions have been raised which have been responded to, but not "answered". In closing, they are briefly outlined.

- Is the data on Child Welfare service delivery rates accurate and the best to use? Since these are point in time data (i.e. taken on the last day of the year). This is a legitimate question. As the Department improves its data system and as alternative measures are developed, this question can be addressed. For now, however, these are the best available.

- Are there other variables which were not included which were more significant? There probably are, and people have been encouraged to suggest these for addition to the process. Some which have been suggested, however, are either unmeasurable, not significant, or highly intercorrelated with what is already included.

- Might the fact that some counties do not have the tax base to raise the needed match money account for their low rate? This is probably not only true, but the economic data would suggest that it could be a saliant factor in not only determining the level of service, but also the type of service rendered. It is suggested, however, that the solution of this problem can be found not by changing the formula for determining how many state dollars the county can put up match for, but by varying the match rate.

- Does this address the question of community based vs. placement services? No, it does not. It has been suggested, in fact, that it should not. Rather, if the state wishes to impact on this question, they should look to the question of the match formulae or regulations. Also, if the Counties wish to focus the expenditures on the more expensive placement services, they will soon find that they have used up all of their state matching money and will be spending county-only money for this purpose.

- Does the formula reward people who are doing "good things"? Again, the answer is no. And, again, it is suggested that it should not be in this formula. Rather, it could be considered that the redistribution of unused state funds could be allocated for this purpose. Another suggestion is that certain time-consuming, expensive regulation could be waived for those who are accomplishing the ends desired.

As should be evident, this paper is not viewed as an "end product". Rather, it is a step in what is hoped will be an extended effort at rational decision making using the insights gained from an ongoing process of research.

FOOTNOTES

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52. See Ross, et.al. Indicators of Social Well Being for U.S. Counties, USDA, 1979.

53. It might be noted that this process resulted in an adjustment for two factor: The relative cost of living and the higher costs associated with dealing with more difficult social problems.

54. Because the data for the very small counties was so relatively unstable, several came up as being predicted to need relatively considerably fewer dollars than they had been previously given. It was recommended that a floor be established based on previous funding levels to compensate for this. Since this accounted for less than 1% of the budget funds, the adjustments necessary to do this were minor.